

THE JUDGMENT OF VULCAN¹

By LEE FOSTER HARTMAN

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TO dine on the veranda of the Marine Hotel is the one delightful surprise which Port Charlotte affords the adventurer who has broken from the customary paths of travel in the South Seas. On an eminence above the town, solitary and aloof like a monastery, and nestling deep in its garden of lemon-trees, it commands a wide prospect of sea and sky. By day, the Pacific is a vast stretch of blue, flat like a floor, with a blur of distant islands on the horizon — chief among them Muloa, with its single volcanic cone tapering off into the sky. At night, this smithy of Vulcan becomes a glow of red, throbbing faintly against the darkness, a capricious and sullen beacon immeasurably removed from the path of men. Viewed from the veranda of the Marine Hotel, its vast flare on the horizon seems hardly more than an insignificant spark, like the glowing cigar-end of some guest strolling in the garden after dinner.

It may very likely have been my lighted cigar that guided Eleanor Stanleigh to where I was sitting in the shadows. Her uncle, Major Stanleigh, had left me a few minutes before, and I was glad of the respite from the queer business he had involved me in. The two of us had returned that afternoon from Muloa, where I had taken him in my schooner, the *Sylph*, to seek out Leavitt and make some inquiries — very important inquiries, it seemed, in Miss Stanleigh's behalf.

Three days in Muloa, under the shadow of the grim and flame-throated mountain, while I was forced to listen to Major Stanleigh's persistent questionnaire and Leavitt's erratic and garrulous responses — all this, as I was to

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discover later, at the instigation of the Major's niece — had made me frankly curious about the girl.

I had seen her only once, and then at a distance across the veranda, one night when I had been dining there with a friend; but that single vision of her remained vivid and unforgettable — a tall girl of a slender shapeliness, crowned by a mass of reddish-gold hair that smoldered above the clear olive pallor of her skin. With that flawless and brilliant coloring she was marked for observation — had doubtless been schooled to a perfect indifference to it, for the slow, almost indolent, grace of her movements was that of a woman coldly unmindful of the gazes lingering upon her. She could not have been more than twenty-six or -seven, but I got an unmistakable impression of weariness or balked purpose emanating from her in spite of her youth and glorious physique. I looked up to see her crossing the veranda to join her uncle and aunt — correct, well-to-do English people that one placed instantly — and my stare was only one of many that followed her as she took her seat and threw aside the light scarf that swathed her bare and gleaming shoulders.

My companion, who happened to be the editor of the local paper, promptly informed me regarding her name and previous residence — the gist of some "social item" which he had already put into print; but these meant nothing, and I could only wonder what had brought her to such an out-of-the-way part of the world as Port Charlotte. She did not seem like a girl who was traveling with her uncle and aunt; one got rather the impression that she was bent on a mission of her own and was dragging her relatives along because the conventions demanded it. I hazarded to my companion the notion that a woman like Miss Stanleigh could have but one of two purposes in this lonely part of the world — she was fleeing from a lover or seeking one.

"In that case," rejoined my friend, with the cynical shrug of the newspaper man, "she has very promptly succeeded. It's whispered that she is going to marry Joyce — of Malduna Island, you know. Only met him a fortnight ago. Quite a romance, I'm told."

I lifted my eyebrows at that, and looked again at Miss Stanleigh. Just at that instant she happened to look up. It was a wholly indifferent gaze; I am confident that she was no more aware of me than if I had been one of the veranda posts which her eyes had chanced to encounter. But in the indescribable sensation of that moment I felt that here was a woman who bore a secret burden, although, as my informing host put it, her heart had romantically found its haven only two weeks ago.

She was endeavoring to get trace of a man named Farquharson, as I was permitted to learn a few days later. Ostensibly, it was Major Stanleigh who was bent on locating this young Englishman — Miss Stanleigh's interest in the quest was guardedly withheld — and the trail had led him a pretty chase around the world until some clue, which I never clearly understood, brought them to Port Charlotte. The major's immediate objective was an eccentric chap named Leavitt who had marooned himself in Muloa. The island offered an ideal retreat for one bent on shunning his own kind, if he did not object to the close proximity of a restive volcano. Clearly, Leavitt did not. He had a scientific interest in the phenomena exhibited by volcanic regions and was versed in geological lore, but the rumors about Leavitt — practically no one ever visited Muloa — did not stop at that. And, as Major Stanleigh and I were to discover, the fellow seemed to have developed a genuine affection for Lakalatcha, as the smoking cone was called by the natives of the adjoining islands. From long association he had come to know its whims and moods as one comes to know those of a petulant woman one lives with. It was a bizarre and preposterous intimacy, in which Leavitt seemed to find a wholly acceptable substitute for human society, and there was something repellant about the man's eccentricity. He had various names for the smoking cone that towered a mile or more above his head: "Old Flame-eater," or "Lava-spitter," he would at times familiarly and irreverently call it; or, again, "The Maiden Who Never Sleeps," or "The Single-breasted

Virgin"—these last, however, always in the musical Malay equivalent. He had no end of names—romantic, splenetic, of opprobrium, or outright endearment—to suit, I imagine, Lakalatcha's varying moods. In one respect they puzzled me—they were of conflicting genders, some feminine and some masculine, as if in Leavitt's loose-frayed imagination the mountain that beguiled his days and disturbed his nights were hermaphroditic.

Leavitt as a source of information regarding the missing Farquharson seemed preposterous when one reflected how out of touch with the world he had been, but, to my astonishment, Major Stanleigh's clue was right, for he had at last stumbled upon a man who had known Farquharson well and who was voluminous about him—quite willingly so. With the *Sylph* at anchor, we lay off Muloa for three nights, and Leavitt gave us our fill of Farquharson, along with innumerable digressions about volcanoes, neoplatonism, the Single Tax, and what not. There was no keeping Leavitt to a coherent narrative about the missing Farquharson. He was incapable of it, and Major Stanleigh and myself had simply to wait in patience while Leavitt, delighted to have an audience, dumped out for us the fantastic contents of his mind, odd vagaries, recondite trash, and all. He was always getting away from Farquharson, but, then, he was unfailingly bound to come back to him. We had only to wait and catch the solid grains that now and then fell in the winnowing of that unending stream of chaff. It was a tedious and exasperating process, but it had its compensations. At times Leavitt could be as uncannily brilliant as he was dull and boresome. The conviction grew upon me that he had become a little demented, as if his brain had been tainted by the sulphurous fumes exhaled by the smoking crater above his head. His mind smoked, flickered, and flared like an unsteady lamp, blown upon by choking gases, in which the oil had run low.

But of the wanderer Farquharson he spoke with precision and authority, for he had shared with Farquharson

his bungalow there in Muloa—a period of about six months, it seemed—and there Farquharson had contracted a tropic fever and died.

“Well, at last we have got all the facts,” Major Stanleigh sighed with satisfaction when the *Sylph* was heading back to Port Charlotte. Muloa, lying astern, we were no longer watching. Leavitt, at the water’s edge, had waved us a last good-by and had then abruptly turned back into the forest, very likely to go clambering like a demented goat up the flanks of his beloved volcano and to resume poking about in its steaming fissures—an occupation of which he never tired.

“The evidence is conclusive, don’t you think?—the grave, Farquharson’s personal effects, those pages of the poor devil’s diary.”

I nodded assent. In my capacity as owner of the *Sylph* I had merely undertaken to furnish Major Stanleigh with passage to Muloa and back, but the events of the last three days had made me a party to the many conferences, and I was now on terms of something like intimacy with the rather stiff and pompous English gentleman. How far I was from sharing his real confidence I was to discover later when Eleanor Stanleigh gave me hers.

“My wife and niece will be much relieved to hear all this—a family matter, you understand, Mr. Barnaby,” he had said to me when we landed. “I should like to present you to them before we leave Port Charlotte for home.”

But, as it turned out, it was Eleanor Stanleigh who presented herself, coming upon me quite unexpectedly that night after our return while I sat smoking in the shadowy garden of the Marine Hotel. I had dined with the major, after he had explained that the ladies were worn out by the heat and general developments of the day and had begged to be excused. And I was frankly glad not to have to endure another discussion of the deceased Farquharson, of which I was heartily tired after hearing little else for the last three days. I could not help wondering how the verbose and pompous major had paraphrased and condensed that inchoate mass of biog-

raphy and reminiscence into an orderly account for his wife and niece. He had doubtless devoted the whole afternoon to it. Sitting under the cool green of the lemon-trees, beneath a sky powdered with stars, I reflected that I, at least, was done with Farquharson forever. But I was not, for just then Eleanor Stanleigh appeared before me.

I was startled to hear her addressing me by name, and then calmly begging me to resume my seat on the bench under the arbor. She sat down also, her flame-colored hair and bare shoulders gleaming in the darkness. She was the soul of directness and candor, and after a thoughtful, searching look into my face she came to the point at once. She wanted to hear about Farquharson — from me.

"Of course, my uncle has given me a very full account of what he learned from Mr. Leavitt, and yet many things puzzle me — this Mr. Leavitt most of all."

"A queer chap," I epitomized him. "Frankly, I don't quite make him out, Miss Stanleigh — marooning himself on that infernal island and seemingly content to spend his days there."

"Is he so old?" she caught me up quickly.

"No, he isn't," I reflected. "Of course, it's difficult to judge ages out here. The climate, you know. Leavitt's well under forty, I should say. But that's a most unhealthy spot he has chosen to live in."

"Why does he stay there?"

I explained about the volcano. "You can have no idea what an obsession it is with him. There isn't a square foot of its steaming, treacherous surface that he hasn't been over, mapping new fissures, poking into old lava-beds, delving into the crater itself on favorable days —"

"Isn't it dangerous?"

"In a way, yes. The volcano itself is harmless enough. It smokes unpleasantly now and then, splutters and rumbles as if about to obliterate all creation, but for all its bluster it only manages to spill a trickle or two of fresh lava down its sides — just tamely subsides after deluging Leavitt with a shower of cinders and ashes.

But Leavitt won't leave it alone. He goes poking into the very crater, half strangling himself in its poisonous fumes, scorching the shoes off his feet, and once, I believe, he lost most of his hair and eyebrows — a narrow squeak. He throws his head back and laughs at any word of caution. To my notion, it's foolhardy to push a scientific curiosity to that extreme."

"Is it, then, just scientific curiosity?" mused Miss Stanleigh.

Something in her tone made me stop short. Her eyes had lifted to mine — almost appealingly, I fancied. Her innocence, her candor, her warm beauty, which was like a pale phosphorescence in the starlit darkness — all had their potent effect upon me in that moment. I felt impelled to a sudden burst of confidence.

"At times I wonder. I've caught a look in his eyes, when he's been down on his hands and knees, staring into some infernal vent-hole — a look that is — well, uncanny, as if he were peering into the bowels of the earth for something quite outside the conceptions of science. You might think that volcano had worked some spell over him, turned his mind. He prattles to it or storms at it as if it were a living creature. Queer, yes; and he's impressive, too, with a sort of magnetic personality that attracts and repels you violently at the same time. He's like a cake of ice dipped in alcohol and set aflame. I can't describe him. When he talks —"

"Does he talk about himself?"

I had to confess that he had told us practically not a word. He had discussed everything under heaven in his brilliant, erratic way, with a fleer of cynicism toward it all, but he had left himself out completely. He had given us Farquharson with relish, and in infinite detail, from the time the poor fellow first turned up in Muloa, put ashore by a native craft. Talking about Farquharson was second only to his delight in talking about volcanoes. And the result for me had been innumerable vivid but confused impressions of the young Englishman who had by chance invaded Leavitt's solitude and had lingered there, held by some attraction, until he sickened

and died. It was like a jumbled mosaic put together again by inexpert hands.

"Did you get the impression that the two men had very much in common?"

"Quite the contrary," I answered. "But Major Stanleigh should know —"

"My uncle never met Mr. Farquharson."

I was fairly taken aback at that, and a silence fell between us. It was impossible to divine the drift of her questions. It was as if some profound mistrust weighed upon her and she was not so much seeking to interrogate me as she was groping blindly for some chance word of mine that might illuminate her doubts.

I looked at the girl in silent wonder, yes, and in admiration of her bronze and ivory beauty in the full flower of her glorious youth — and I thought of Joyce. I felt that it was like her to have fallen in love simply but passionately at the mere lifting of the finger of Fate. It was only another demonstration of the unfathomable mystery, or miracle, which love is. Joyce was lucky, indeed favored of the gods, to have touched the spring in this girl's heart which no other man could reach, and by the rarest of chances — her coming out to this remote corner of the world. Lucky Joyce! I knew him slightly — a straightforward young fellow, very simple and whole-souled, enthusiastically absorbed in developing his rubber lands in Malduna.

Miss Stanleigh remained lost in thought while her fingers toyed with the pendant of the chain that she wore. In the darkness I caught the glitter of a small gold cross.

"Mr. Barnaby," she finally broke the silence, and paused. "I have decided to tell you something. This Mr. Farquharson was my husband."

Again a silence fell, heavy and prolonged, in which I sat as if drugged by the night air that hung soft and perfumed about us. It seemed incredible that in that fleeting instant she had spoken at all.

"I was young — and very foolish, I suppose."

With that confession, spoken with simple dignity, she

broke off again. Clearly, some knowledge of the past she deemed it necessary to impart to me. If she halted over her words, it was rather to dismiss what was irrelevant to the matter in hand, in which she sought my counsel.

"I did not see him for four years — did not wish to. . . . And he vanished completely. . . . Four years! — just a welcome blank!"

Her shoulders lifted and a little shiver went over her.

"But even a blank like that can become unendurable. To be always dragging at a chain, and not knowing where it leads to. . . ." Her hand slipped from the gold cross on her breast and fell to the other in her lap, which it clutched tightly. "Four years. . . . I tried to make myself believe that he was gone forever — was dead. It was wicked of me."

My murmur of polite dissent led her to repeat her words.

"Yes, and even worse than that. During the past month I have actually prayed that he might be dead. . . . I shall be punished for it."

I ventured no rejoinder to these words of self-condemnation. Joyce, I reflected, mundanely, had clearly swept her off her feet in the ardor of their first meeting and instant love.

"It must be a great relief to you," I murmured at length, "to have it all definitely settled at last."

"If I could only feel that it was!"

I turned in amazement, to see her leaning a little forward, her hands still tightly clasped in her lap, and her eyes fixed upon the distant horizon where the red spark of Lakalatcha's stertorous breathing flamed and died away. Her breast rose and fell, as if timed to the throbbing of that distant flare.

"I want you to take me to that island — to-morrow."

"Why, surely, Miss Stanleigh," I burst forth, "there can't be any reasonable doubt. Leavitt's mind may be a little flighty — he may have embroidered his story with a few gratuitous details; but Farquharson's books and

things—the material evidence of his having lived there —”

“And having died there?”

“Surely Leavitt wouldn’t have fabricated that! If you had talked with him —”

“I should not care to talk with Mr. Leavitt,” Miss Stanleigh cut me short. “I want only to go and see — if he is Mr. Leavitt.”

“If he is Mr. Leavitt!” For a moment I was mystified, and then in a sudden flash I understood. “But that’s preposterous — impossible!”

I tried to conceive of Leavitt in so monstrous a rôle, tried to imagine the missing Farquharson still in the flesh and beguiling Major Stanleigh and myself with so outlandish a story, devising all that ingenious detail to trick us into a belief in his own death. It would indeed have argued a warped mind, guided by some unfathomable purpose.

“I devoutly hope you are right,” Miss Stanleigh was saying, with deliberation. “But it is not preposterous, and it is not impossible — if you had known Mr. Farquharson as I have.”

It was a discreet confession. She wished me to understand — without the necessity of words. My surmise was that she had met and married Farquharson, whoever he was, under the spell of some momentary infatuation, and that he had proved himself to be an unspeakable brute whom she had speedily abandoned.

“I am determined to go to Muloa, Mr. Barnaby,” she announced, with decision. “I want you to make the arrangements, and with as much secrecy as possible. I shall ask my aunt to go with me.”

I assured Miss Stanleigh that the *Sylph* was at her service.

Mrs. Stanleigh was a large bland woman, inclined to stoutness and to making confidences, with an intense dislike of the tropics and physical discomforts of any sort. How her niece prevailed upon her to make that surrepti-

tious trip to Muloa, which we set out upon two days later, I have never been able to imagine. The accommodations aboard the schooner were cramped, to say the least, and the good lady had a perfect horror of volcanoes. The fact that Lakalatcha had behind it a record of a century or more of good conduct did not weigh with her in the least. She was convinced that it would blow its head off the moment the *Sylph* got within range. She was fidgety, talkative, and continually concerned over the state of her complexion, inspecting it in the mirror of her bag at frequent intervals and using a powder-puff liberally to mitigate the pernicious effects of the tropic sun. But once having been induced to make the voyage, I must admit she stuck manfully by her decision, ensconcing herself on deck with books and cushions and numerous other necessities to her comfort, and making the best of the sleeping quarters below. As the captain of the *Sylph*, she wanted me to understand that she had intrusted her soul to my charge, declaring that she would not draw an easy breath until we were safe again in Port Charlotte.

"This dreadful business of Eleanor's," was the way she referred to our mission, and she got round quite naturally to telling me of Farquharson while acquainting me with her fears about volcanoes. Some years before, Pompeii and Herculaneum had had a most unsettling effect upon her nerves. Vesuvius was slightly in eruption at the time. She confessed to never having had an easy moment while in Naples. And it was in Naples that her niece and Farquharson had met. It had been, as I surmised, a swift, romantic courtship, in which Farquharson, quite irreproachable in antecedents and manners, had played the part of an impetuous lover. Italian skies had done the rest. There was an immediate marriage, in spite of Mrs. Stanleigh's protests, and the young couple were off on a honeymoon trip by themselves. But when Mrs. Stanleigh rejoined her husband at Nice, and together they returned to their home in Sussex, a surprise was in store for them. Eleanor was already there — alone, crushed, and with lips absolutely sealed. She had

divested herself of everything that linked her to Farquharson; she refused to adopt her married name.

"I shall bless every saint in heaven when we have quite done with this dreadful business of Eleanor's," Mrs. Stanleigh confided to me from her deck-chair. "This trip that she insists on making herself seems quite uncalled for. But you needn't think, Captain Barnaby, that I'm going to set foot on that dreadful island — not even for the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Farquharson's grave — and I'm shameless enough to say that it *would* be a satisfaction. If you could imagine the tenth part of what I have had to put up with, all these months we've been traveling about trying to locate the wretch! No, indeed — I shall stay right here on this boat and intrust Eleanor to your care while ashore. And I should not think it ought to take long, now should it?"

I confessed aloud that I did not see how it could. If by any chance the girl's secret conjecture about Leavitt's identity was right, it would be verified in the mere act of coming face to face with him, and in that event it would be just as well to spare the unsuspecting aunt the shock of that discovery.

We reached Muloa just before nightfall, letting go the anchor in placid water under the lee of the shore while the *Sylph* swung to and the sails fluttered and fell. A vast hush lay over the world. From the shore the dark green of the forest confronted us with no sound or sign of life. Above, and at this close distance blotting out half the sky over our heads, towered the huge cone of Lakalatcha with scarred and blackened flanks. It was in one of its querulous moods. The feathery white plume of steam, woven by the wind into soft, fantastic shapes, no longer capped the crater; its place had been usurped by thick, dark fumes of smoke swirling sullenly about. In the fading light I marked the red, malignant glow of a fissure newly broken out in the side of the ragged cone, from which came a thin, white trickle of lava.

There was no sign of Leavitt, although the *Sylph* must have been visible to him for several hours, obviously mak-

ing for the island. I fancied that he must have been unusually absorbed in the vagaries of his beloved volcano. Otherwise he would have wondered what was bringing us back again and his tall figure in shabby white drill would have greeted us from the shore. Instead, there confronted us only the belt of dark, matted green girdling the huge bulk of Lakalatcha which soared skyward, sinister, mysterious, eternal.

In the brief twilight the shore vanished into dim obscurity. Miss Stanleigh, who for the last hour had been standing by the rail, silently watching the island, at last spoke to me over her shoulder:

"Is it far inland—the place? Will it be difficult to find in the dark?"

Her question staggered me, for she was clearly bent on seeking out Leavitt at once. A strange calmness overlaid her. She paid no heed to Lakalatcha's gigantic, smoke-belching cone, but, with fingers gripping the rail, scanned the forbidding and inscrutable forest, behind which lay the answer to her torturing doubt.

I acceded to her wish without protest. Leavitt's bungalow lay a quarter of a mile distant. There would be no difficulty in following the path. I would have a boat put over at once, I announced in a casual way which belied my real feelings, for I was beginning to share some of her secret tension at this night invasion of Leavitt's haunts.

This feeling deepened within me as we drew near the shore. Leavitt's failure to appear seemed sinister and enigmatic. I began to evolve a fantastic image of him as I recalled his queer ways and his uncanny tricks of speech. It was as if we were seeking out the presiding deity of the island, who had assumed the guise of a Caliban holding unearthly sway over its unnatural processes.

With Williams, the boatswain, carrying a lantern, we pushed into the brush, following the choked trail that led to Leavitt's abode. But the bungalow, when we had reached the clearing and could discern the outlines of the building against the masses of the forest, was dark and deserted. As we mounted the veranda, the loose boards creaked hollowly under our tread; the doorway, from

which depended a tattered curtain of coarse burlap, gaped black and empty.

The lantern, lifted high in the boatswain's hand, cleft at a stroke the darkness within. On the writing-table, cluttered with papers and bits of volcanic rock, stood a bottle and half-empty glass. Things lay about in lugubrious disorder, as if the place had been hurriedly ransacked by a thief. Some of the geological specimens had tumbled from the table to the floor, and stray sheets of Leavitt's manuscripts lay under his chair. Leavitt's books, ranged on shelving against the wall, alone seemed undisturbed. Upon the top of the shelving stood two enormous stuffed birds, moldering and decrepit, regarding the sudden illumination with unblinking, bead-like eyes. Between them a small dancing faun in greenish bronze tripped a Bacchic measure with head thrown back in a transport of derisive laughter.

For a long moment the three of us faced the silent, disordered room, in which the little bronze faun alone seemed alive, convulsed with diabolical mirth at our entrance. Somehow it recalled to me Leavitt's own cynical laugh. Suddenly Miss Stanleigh made toward the photographs above the bookshelves.

"This is he," she said, taking up one of the faded prints.

"Yes — Leavitt," I answered.

"*Leavitt?*" Her fingers tightened upon the photograph. Then, abruptly, it fell to the floor. "Yes, yes — of course." Her eyes closed very slowly, as if an extreme weakness had seized her.

In the shock of that moment I reached out to support her, but she checked my hand. Her gray eyes opened again. A shudder visibly went over her, as if the night air had suddenly become chill. From the shelf the two stuffed birds regarded us dolefully, while the dancing faun, with head thrown back in an attitude of immortal art, laughed derisively.

"Where is he? I must speak to him," said Miss Stanleigh.

"One might think he were deliberately hiding," I mut-

tered, for I was at a loss to account for Leavitt's absence.

"Then find him," the girl commanded.

I cut short my speculations to direct Williams to search the hut in the rear of the bungalow, where, behind bamboo palings, Leavitt's Malay servant maintained an aloof and mysterious existence. I sat down beside Miss Stanleigh on the veranda steps to find my hands sooty from the touch of the boards. A fine volcanic ash was evidently drifting in the air and now to my ear, attuned to the profound stillness, the wind bore a faint humming sound.

"Do you hear that?" I whispered. It was like the far-off murmur of a gigantic caldron, softly a-boil—a dull vibration that seemed to reach us through the ground as well as through the air.

The girl listened a moment, and then started up. "I hear voices—somewhere."

"Voices?" I strained my ears for sounds other than the insistent ferment of the great cone above our heads. "Perhaps Leavitt—"

"Why do you still call him Leavitt?"

"Then you're quite certain—" I began, but an involuntary exclamation from her cut me short.

The light of Williams's lantern, emerging from behind the bamboo palings, disclosed the burly form of the boatswain with a shrinking Malay in tow. He was jabbering in his native tongue, with much gesticulation of his thin arms, and going into contortions at every dozen paces in a sort of pantomime to emphasize his words. Williams urged him along unceremoniously to the steps of the veranda.

"Perhaps you can get the straight of this, Mr. Barnaby," said the boatswain. "He swears that the flame-devil in the volcano has swallowed his master alive."

The poor fellow seemed indeed in a state of complete funk. With his thin legs quaking under him, he poured forth in Malay a crazed, distorted tale. According to Wadakimba, Leavitt—or Farquharson, to give him his real name—had awakened the high displeasure of the flame-devil within the mountain. Had we not observed that the cone was smoking furiously? And the dust and

heavy taint of sulphur in the air? Surely we could feel the very tremor of the ground under our feet. All that day the enraged monster had been spouting mud and lava down upon the white *tuan*, who had remained in the bungalow, drinking heavily and bawling out maledictions upon his enemy. At length, in spite of Wadakimba's efforts to dissuade him, he had set out to climb to the crater, vowing to show the flame-devil who was master. He had compelled the terrified Wadakimba to go with him a part of the way. The white *tuan* — was he really a god, as he declared himself to be? — had gone alone up the tortuous, fissured slopes, at times lost to sight in yellowish clouds of gas and steam, while his screams of vengeance came back to Wadakimba's ears. Overhead, Lakalatcha continued to rumble and quiver and clear his throat with great showers of mud and stones.

Farquharson must have indeed parted with his reason to have attempted that grotesque sally. Listening to Wadakimba's tale, I pictured the crazed man, scorched to tatters, heedless of bruises and burns, scrambling up that difficult and perilous ascent, and hurling his ridiculous blasphemy into the flares of smoke and steam that issued from that vast caldron lit by subterranean fires. At its simmering the whole island trembled. A mere whiff of the monster's breath and he would have been snuffed out, annihilated in an instant. According to Wadakimba, the end had indeed come in that fashion. It was as if the mountain had suddenly given a deep sigh. The blast had carried away solid rock. A sheet of flame had licked the spot where Farquharson had been hurled headlong, and he was not.

Wadakimba, viewing all this from afar, had scuttled off to his hut. Later he had ventured back to the scene of the tragedy. He had picked up Farquharson's scorched helmet, which had been blown off to some distance, and he also exhibited a pair of binoculars washed down by the tide of lava, scarred and twisted by the heat, from which the lenses had melted away.

I translated for Miss Stanleigh briefly, while she stood turning over in her hands the twisted and blackened

binoculars, which were still warm. She heard me through without question or comment, and when I proposed that we get back to the *Sylph* at once, mindful of her aunt's distressed nerves, she assented with a nod. She seemed to have lost the power of speech. In a daze she followed as I led the way back through the forest.

Major Stanleigh and his wife deferred their departure for England until their niece should be properly married to Joyce. At Eleanor's wish, it was a very simple affair, and as Joyce's bride she was as eager to be off to his rubber-plantation in Malduna as he was to set her up there as mistress of his household. I had agreed to give them passage on the *Sylph*, since the next sailing of the mail-boat would have necessitated a further fortnight's delay.

Mrs. Stanleigh, with visions of seeing England again, and profoundly grateful to a benevolent Providence that had not only brought "this dreadful business of Eleanor's" to a happy termination, but had averted Lakalatcha's baptism of fire from descending upon her own head, thanked me profusely and a little tearfully. It was during the general chorus of farewells at the last moment before the *Sylph* cast off. Her last appeal, cried after us from the wharf where she stood frantically waving a wet handkerchief, was that I should give Muloa a wide berth.

It brought a laugh from Joyce. He had discovered the good lady's extreme perturbation in regard to Lakalatcha, and had promptly declared for spending a day there with his bride. It was an exceptional opportunity to witness the volcano in its active mood. Each time that Joyce had essayed this teasing pleasantry, which never failed to draw Mrs. Stanleigh's protests, I observed that his wife remained silent. I assumed that she had decided to keep her own counsel in regard to the trip she had made there.

"I'm trusting you not to take Eleanor near that dreadful island, Mr. Barnaby," was the admonition shouted across the widening gap of water.

It was a quite unnecessary appeal, for Joyce, who was presently sitting with his wife in a sheltered quarter of

the deck, had not the slightest interest in the smoking cone which was as yet a mere smudge upon the horizon. Eleanor, with one hand in Joyce's possession, at times watched it with a seemingly vast apathy until some ardent word from Joyce would draw her eyes back to his and she would lift to him a smile that was like a caress. The look of weariness and balked purpose that had once marked her expression had vanished. In the week since she had married Joyce she seemed to have grown younger and to be again standing on the very threshold of life with girlish eagerness. She hung on Joyce's every word, communing with him hour after hour, utterly content, indifferent to all the world about her.

In the cabin that evening at dinner, when the two of them deigned to take polite cognizance of my existence, I announced to Joyce that I proposed to hug the island pretty close during the night. It would save considerable time.

"Just as you like, Captain," Joyce replied, indifferently.

"We may get a shower of ashes by doing so, if the wind should shift." I looked across the table at Mrs. Joyce.

"But we shall reach Malduna that much sooner?" she queried.

I nodded. "However, if you feel any uneasiness, I'll give the island a wide berth." I didn't like the idea of dragging her—the bride of a week—past that place with its unspeakable memories, if it should really distress her.

Her eyes thanked me silently across the table. "It's very kind of you, but"—she chose her words with significant deliberation—"I haven't a fear in the world, Mr. Barnaby."

Evening had fallen when we came up on deck. Joyce bethought himself of some cigars in his state-room and went back. For the moment I was alone with his wife by the rail, watching the stars beginning to prick through the darkening sky. The *Sylph* was running smoothly, with the wind almost aft; the scud of water past her

bows and the occasional creak of a block aloft were the only sounds audible in the silence that lay like a benediction upon the sea.

"You may think it unfeeling of me," she began, quite abruptly, "but all this past trouble of mine, now that it is ended, I have completely dismissed. Already it begins to seem like a horrid dream. And as for that island" — her eyes looked off toward Muloa now impending upon us and lighting up the heavens with its sudden flare — "it seems incredible that I ever set foot upon it.

"Perhaps you understand," she went on, after a pause, "that I have not told my husband. But I have not deceived him. He knows that I was once married, and that the man is no longer living. He does not wish to know more. Of course he is aware that Uncle Geoffrey came out here to — to see a Mr. Leavitt, a matter which he has no idea concerned me. He thanks the stars for whatever it was that did bring us out here, for otherwise he would not have met me."

"It has turned out most happily," I murmured.

"It was almost disaster. After meeting Mr. Joyce — and I was weak enough to let myself become engaged — to have discovered that I was still chained to a living creature like that. . . . I should have killed myself."

"But surely the courts —"

She shook her head with decision. "My church does not recognize that sort of freedom."

We were drawing steadily nearer to Muloa. The mountain was breathing slowly and heavily — a vast flare that lifted fanlike in the skies and died away. Lightning played fitfully through the dense mass of smoke and choking gases that hung like a pall over the great cone. It was like the night sky that overhangs a city of gigantic blast-furnaces, only infinitely multiplied. The sails of the *Sylph* caught the ruddy tinge like a phantom craft gliding through the black night, its canvas still dyed with the sunset glow. The faces of the crew, turned to watch the spectacle, curiously fixed and inhuman, were picked out of the gloom by the same fantastic light. It was as if the schooner, with masts and riggings, etched black

against the lurid sky, sailed on into the Day of Judgment.

It was after midnight. The *Sylph* came about, with sails trembling, and lost headway. Suddenly she vibrated from stem to stern, and with a soft grating sound that was unmistakable came to rest. We were aground in what should have been clear water, with the forest-clad shore of Muloa lying close off to port.

The helmsman turned to me with a look of silly fright on his face, as the wheel revolved useless in his hands. We had shelved with scarcely a jar sufficient to disturb those sleeping below, but in a twinkling Jackson, the mate, appeared on deck in his pajamas, and after a swift glance toward the familiar shore turned to me with the same dumfounded look that had frozen upon the face of the steersman.

"What do you make of this?" he exclaimed, as I called for the lead.

"Be quiet about it," I said to the hands that had started into movement. "Look sharp now, and make no noise." Then I turned to the mate, who was perplexedly rubbing one bare foot against the other and measuring with his eye our distance from the shore. The *Sylph* should have turned the point of the island without a mishap, as she had done scores of times.

"It's the volcano we have to thank for this," was my conjecture. "Its recent activity has caused some displacement of the sea bottom."

Jackson's head went back in sudden comprehension. "It's a miracle you didn't plow into it under full sail."

We had indeed come about in the very nick of time to avoid disaster. As matters stood I was hopeful. "With any sort of luck we ought to float clear with the tide."

The mate cocked a doubtful eye at Lakalatcha, uncomfortably close above our heads, flaming at intervals and bathing the deck with an angry glare of light. "If she should begin spitting up a little livelier . . ." he speculated with a shrug, and presently took himself off to his bunk after an inspection below had shown that none of the

schooner's seams had started. There was nothing to do but to wait for the tide to make and lift the vessel clear. It would be a matter of three or four hours. I dismissed the helmsman; and the watch forward, taking advantage of the respite from duty, were soon recumbent in attitudes of heavy sleep.

The wind had died out and a heavy torpor lay upon the water. It was as if the stars alone held to their slow courses above a world rigid and inanimate. The *Sylph* lay with a slight list, her spars looking inexpressibly helpless against the sky, and, as the minutes dragged, a fine volcanic ash, like some mortal pestilence exhaled by the monster cone, settled down upon the deck, where, forward in the shadow, the watch curled like dead men.

Alone, I paced back and forth — countless soft-footed miles, it seemed, through interminable hours, until at length some obscure impulse prompted me to pause before the open skylight over the cabin and thrust my head down. A lamp above the dining-table, left to burn through the night, feebly illuminated the room. A faint snore issued at regular intervals from the half-open door of the mate's state-room. The door of Joyce's state-room opposite was also upon the hook for the sake of air.

Suddenly a soft thump against the side of the schooner, followed by a scrambling noise, made me turn round. The dripping, bedraggled figure of a man in a sleeping-suit mounted the rope ladder that hung over the side, and paused, grasping the rail. I had withdrawn my gaze so suddenly from the glow of the light in the cabin that for several moments the intruder from out of the sea was only a blurred form with one leg swung over the rail, where he hung as if spent by his exertions.

Just then the sooty vapors above the ragged maw of the volcano were rent by a flare of crimson, and in the fleeting instant of unnatural daylight I beheld Farquharson barefooted, and dripping with sea-water, confronting me with a sardonic, triumphant smile. The light faded in a twinkling, but in the darkness he swung his other leg over the rail and sat perched there, as if challenging the testimony of my senses.

"Farquharson!" I breathed aloud, utterly dumfounded.

"Did you think I was a ghost?" I could hear him softly laughing to himself in the interval that followed. "You should have witnessed Wadakimba's fright at my coming back from the dead. Well, I'll admit I almost was done for."

Again the volcano breathed in torment. It was like the sudden opening of a gigantic blast-furnace, and in that instant I saw him vividly — his thin, saturnine face, his damp black hair pushed sleekly back, his lips twisted to a cruel smile, his eyes craftily alert, as if to some ambushed danger continually at hand. He was watching me with a sort of malicious relish in the shock he had given me.

"It was not your intention to stop at Muloa," he observed, dryly, for the plight of the schooner was obvious.

"We'll float clear with the tide," I muttered.

"But in the meantime" — there was something almost menacing in his deliberate pause — "I have the pleasure of this little call upon you."

A head lifted from among the inert figures and sleepily regarded us before it dropped back into the shadows. The stranded ship, the recumbent men, the mountain flaming overhead — it was like a phantom world into which had been suddenly thrust this ghastly and incredible reality.

"Whatever possessed you to swim out here in the middle of the night?" I demanded, in a harsh whisper.

He chose to ignore the question, while I waited in a chill of suspense. It was inconceivable that he could be aware of the truth of the situation and deliberately bent on forcing it to its unspeakable, tragic issue.

"Of late, Captain Barnaby, we seem to have taken to vitising each other rather frequently, don't you think?"

It was lightly tossed off, but not without its evil implication; and I felt his eyes intently fixed upon me as he sat hunched up on the rail in his sodden sleeping-suit, like some huge, ill-omened bird of prey.

To get rid of him, to obliterate the horrible fact that he still existed in the flesh, was the instinctive impulse of

my staggered brain. But the peril of discovery, the chance that those sleeping below might awaken and hear us, held me in a vise of indecision.

"If I could bring myself to reproach you, Captain," he went on, ironically polite, "I might protest that your last visit to this island savored to a too-inquisitive intrusion. You'll pardon my frankness. I had convinced you and Major Stanleigh that Farquharson was dead. To the world at large that should have sufficed. That I choose to remain alive is my own affair. Your sudden return to Muloa — with a lady — would have upset everything, if Fate and that inspired fool of a Malay had not happily intervened. But now, surely, there can be no doubt that I am dead?"

I nodded assent in a dumb, helpless way.

"And I have a notion that even you, Captain Barnaby, will never dispute that fact."

He threw back his head suddenly — for all the world like the dancing faun — and laughed silently at the stars.

My tongue was dry in my mouth as I tried to make some rejoinder. He baffled me completely, and meanwhile I was in a tingle of fear lest the mate should come up on deck to see what progress the tide had made, or lest the sound of our voices might waken the girl in Joyce's state-room.

"I can promise you that," I attempted to assure him in weak, sepulchral tones. "And now, if you like, I'll put you ashore in the small boat. You must be getting chilly in that wet sleeping-suit."

"As a matter of fact I am, and I was wondering if you would not offer me something to drink."

"You shall have a bottle to take along," I promised, with alacrity, but he demurred.

"There is no sociability in that. And you seem very lonesome here — stuck for two more hours at least. Come, Captain, fetch your bottle and we will share it together."

He got down from the rail, stretched his arms lazily above his head, and dropped into one of the deck chairs

that had been placed aft for the convenience of my two passengers.

"And cigars, too, Captain," he suggested, with a politeness that was almost impertinence. "We'll have a cozy hour or two out of this tedious wait for the tide to lift you off."

I contemplated him helplessly. There was no alternative but to fall in with whatever mad caprice might seize his brain. If I opposed him, it would lead to high and querulous words; and the hideous fact of his presence there—of his mere existence—I was bound to conceal at all hazards.

"I must ask you to keep quiet," I said, stiffly.

"As a tomb," he agreed, and his eyes twinkled disagreeably in the darkness. "You forget that I am supposed to be in one."

I went stealthily down into the cabin, where I secured a box of cigars and the first couple of bottles that my hands laid hold of in the locker. They proved to contain an old Tokay wine which I had treasured for several years to no particular purpose. The ancient bottles clinked heavily in my grasp as I mounted again to the deck.

"Now this is something like," he purred, watching like a cat my every motion as I set the glasses forth and guardedly drew the cork. He saluted me with a flourish and drank.

To an onlooker that pantomime in the darkness would have seemed utterly grotesque. I tasted the fragrant, heavy wine and waited—waited in an agony of suspense—my ears strained desperately to catch the least sound from below. But a profound silence enveloped the schooner, broken only by the occasional rhythmic snore of the mate.

"You seem rather ill at ease," Farquharson observed from the depths of the deck chair when he had his cigar comfortably aglow. "I trust it isn't this little impromptu call of mine that's disturbing you. After all, life has its unusual moments, and this, I think, is one of them." He sniffed the bouquet of his wine and drank. "It is

rare moments like this — bizarre, incredible, what you like — that compensate for the tedium of years."

His disengaged hand had fallen to the side of the chair, and I now observed in dismay that a scarf belonging to Joyce's wife had been left lying in the chair, and that his fingers were absently twisting the silken fringe.

"I wonder that you stick it out, as you do, on this island," I forced myself to observe, seeking safety in the commonplace, while my eyes, as if fascinated, watched his fingers toying with the ends of the scarf. I was forced to accept the innuendo beneath his enigmatic utterances. His utter baseness and depravity, born perhaps of a diseased mind, I could understand. I had led him to bait a trap with the fiction of his own death, but he could not know that it had been already sprung upon his unsuspecting victims.

He seemed to regard me with contemptuous pity. "Naturally, you wonder. A mere skipper like yourself fails to understand — many things. What can you know of life cooped up in this schooner? You touch only the surface of things just as this confounded boat of yours skims only the top of the water. Once in a lifetime you may come to real grips with life — strike bottom, eh? — as your schooner has done now. Then you're aground and quite helpless. What a pity!"

He lifted his glass and drank it off, then thrust it out to be refilled. "Life as the world lives it — bah!" he dismissed it with the scorn of one who counts himself divested of all illusions. "Life would be an infernal bore if it were not for its paradoxes. Now you, Captain Barnaby, would never dream that in becoming dead to the world — in other people's belief — I have become intensely alive. There are opened up infinite possibilities —"

He drank again and eyed me darkly, and then went on in his crack-brained way, "What is life but a challenge to pretense, a constant exercise in duplicity, with so few that come to master it as an art? Every one goes about with something locked deep in his heart. Take yourself, Captain Barnaby. You have your secrets —

hidden from me, from all the world — which, if they could be dragged out of you — ”

His deep-set eyes bored through the darkness upon me. Hunched up in the deck chair, with his legs crossed under him, he was like an animated Buddha venting a dark philosophy and seeking to undermine my mental balance with his sophistry.

“I’m a plain man of the sea,” I rejoined, bluntly. “I take life as it comes.”

He smiled derisively, drained his glass, and held it out again. “But you have your secrets, rather clumsily guarded, to be sure — ”

“What secrets?” I cried out, goaded almost beyond endurance.

He seemed to deprecate the vigor of my retort and lifted a cautioning hand. “Do you want every one on board to hear this conversation?”

At that moment the smoke-wrapped cone of Lakalatcha was cleft by a sheet of flame, and we confronted each other in a sort of blood-red dawn.

“There is no reason why we should quarrel,” he went on, after darkness had enveloped us again. “But there are times which call for plain speaking. Major Stanleigh is probably hardly aware of just what he said to me under a little artful questioning. It seems that a lady who — shall we say, whom we both have the honor of knowing? — is in love. Love, mark you. It is always interesting to see that flower bud twice from the same stalk. However, one naturally defers to a lady, especially when one is very much in her way. *Place aux dames*, eh? Exit poor Farquharson! You must admit that his was an altruistic soul. Well, she has her freedom — if only to barter it for a new bondage. Shall we drink to the happy future of that romance?”

He lifted to me his glass with ironical invitation, while I sat aghast and speechless, my heart pounding against my ribs. This intolerable colloquy could not last forever. I deliberated what I should do if we were surprised. At the sound of a footfall or the soft creak of a plank I

felt that I might lose all control and leap up and brain him with the heavy bottle in my grasp. I had an insane desire to spring at his throat and throttle his infamous bravado, tumble him overboard and annihilate the last vestige of his existence.

"Come, Captain," he urged, "you, too, have shared in smoothing the path for these lovers. Shall we not drink to their happy union?"

A feeling of utter loathing went over me. I set my glass down. "It would be a more serviceable compliment to the lady in question if I strangled you on the spot," I muttered, boldly.

"But you are forgetting that I am already dead." He threw his head back as if vastly amused, then lurched forward and held out his glass a little unsteadily to be refilled.

He gave me a quick, evil look. "Besides, the noise might disturb your passengers."

I could feel a cold perspiration suddenly breaking out upon my body. Either the fellow had obtained an inkling of the truth in some incredible way, or was blindly on the track of it, guided by some diabolical scent. Under the spell of his eyes I could not manage the outright lie which stuck in my throat.

"What makes you think I have passengers?" I parried, weakly.

With intent or not, he was again fingering the fringe of the scarf that hung over the arm of the chair.

"It is not your usual practice, but you have been carrying them lately."

He drained his glass and sat staring into it, his head drooping a little forward. The heavy wine was beginning to have its effect upon him, but whether it would provoke him to some outright violence or drag him down into a stupor, I could not predict. Suddenly the glass slipped from his fingers and shivered to pieces on the deck. I started violently at the sound, and in the silence that followed I thought I heard a footfall in the cabin below.

He looked up at length from his absorbed contemplation of the bits of broken glass. "We were talking about love, were we not?" he demanded, heavily.

I did not answer. I was straining to catch a repetition of the sound from below. Time was slipping rapidly away, and to sit on meant inevitable discovery. The watch might waken or the mate appear to surprise me in converse with my nocturnal visitor. It would be folly to attempt to conceal his presence and I despaired of getting him back to the shore while his present mood held, although I remembered that the small boat, which had been lowered after we went aground, was still moored to the rail amidships.

Refilling my own glass, I offered it to him. He lurched forward to take it, but the fumes of the wine suddenly drifted clear of his brain. "You seem very much distressed," he observed, with ironic concern. "One might think you were actually sheltering these precious love-birds."

Perspiration broke out anew upon my face and neck. "I don't know what you are talking about," I bluntly tried to fend off his implications. I felt as if I were helplessly strapped down and that he was about to probe me mercilessly with some sharp instrument. I strove to turn the direction of his thoughts by saying, "I understand that the Stanleighs are returning to England."

"The Stanleighs—quite so," he nodded agreement, and fixed me with a maudlin stare. Something prompted me to fill his glass again. He drank it off mechanically. Again I poured, and he obediently drank. With an effort he tried to pick up the thread of our conversation:

"What did you say? Oh, the Stanleighs . . . yes, yes, of course." He slowly nodded his head and fell silent. "I was about to say . . ." He broke off again and seemed to ruminate profoundly. . . . "Love-birds—" I caught the word feebly from his lips, spoken as if in a daze. The glass hung dripping in his relaxed grasp.

It was a crucial moment in which his purpose seemed to waver and die in his clouded brain. A great hope

sprang up in my heart, which was hammering furiously. If I could divert his fuddled thoughts and get him back to shore while the wine lulled him to forgetfulness.

I leaned forward to take the glass which was all but slipping from his hand when Lakalatcha flamed with redoubled fury. It was as if the mountain had suddenly bared its fiery heart to the heavens, and a muffled detonation reached my ears.

Farquharson straightened up with a jerk and scanned the smoking peak, from which a new trickle of white-hot lava had broken forth in a threadlike waterfall. He watched its graceful play as if hypnotized, and began babbling to himself in an incoherent prattle. All his faculties seemed suddenly awake, but riveted solely upon the heavy laboring of the mountain. He was chiding it in Malay as if it were a fractious child. When I ventured to urge him back to shore he made no protest, but followed me into the boat. As I pushed off and took up the oars he had eyes for nothing but the flaming cone, as if its leaping fires held for him an Apocalyptic vision.

I strained at the oars as if in a race, with all eternity at stake, blindly urging the boat ahead through water that flashed crimson at every stroke. The mountain now flamed like a beacon, and I rowed for dear life over a sea of blood.

Farquharson sat entranced before the spectacle, chanting to himself a kind of insane ritual, like a Parsee fire-worshiper making obeisance before his god. He was rapt away to some plane of mystic exaltation, to some hinterland of the soul that merged upon madness. When at length the boat crunched upon the sandy shore he got up unsteadily from the stern and pointed to the pharos that flamed in the heavens.

"The fire upon the altar is lit," he addressed me, oracularly, while the fanatic light of a devotee burned in his eyes. "Shall we ascend and prepare the sacrifice?"

I leaned over the oars, panting from my exertions, indifferent to his rhapsody.

"If you'll take my advice, you'll get back at once to

your bungalow and strip off that wet sleeping-suit," I bluntly counseled him, but I might as well have argued with a man in a trance.

He leaped over the gunwale and strode up the beach. Again he struck his priestlike attitude and invoked me to follow.

"The fire upon the altar waits," he repeated, solemnly. Suddenly he broke into a shrill laugh and ran like a deer in the direction of the forest that stretched up the slopes of the mountain.

The mate's face, thrust over the rail as I drew alongside the schooner, plainly bespoke his utter bewilderment. He must have thought me bereft of my senses to be paddling about at that hour of the night. The tide had made, and the *Sylph*, righting her listed masts, was standing clear of the shoal. The deck was astir, and when the command was given to hoist the sails it was obeyed with an uneasy alacrity. The men worked frantically in a bright, unnatural day, for Lakalatcha was now continuously aflame and tossing up red-hot rocks to the accompaniment of dull sounds of explosion.

My first glance about the deck had been one of relief to note that Joyce and his wife were not there, although the commotion of getting under sail must have awakened them. A breeze had sprung up which would prove a fair wind as soon as the *Sylph* stood clear of the point. The mate gave a grunt of satisfaction when at length the schooner began to dip her bow and lay over to her task. Leaving him in charge, I started to go below, when suddenly Mrs. Joyce, fully dressed, confronted me. She seemed to have materialized out of the air like a ghost. Her hair glowed like burnished copper in the unnatural illumination which bathed the deck, but her face was ashen, and the challenge of her eyes made my heart stop short.

"You have been awake long?" I ventured to ask.

"Too long," she answered, significantly, with her face turned away, looking down into the water. She had taken my arm and drawn me toward the rail. Now I felt her

fingers tighten convulsively. In the droop of her head and the tense curve of her neck I sensed her mad impulse which the dark water suggested.

"Mrs. Joyce!" I remonstrated, sharply.

She seemed to go limp all over at the words. I drew her along the deck for a faltering step or two, while her eyes continued to brood upon the water rushing past. Suddenly she spoke:

"What other way out is there?"

"Never that," I said, shortly. I urged her forward again. "Is your husband asleep?"

"Thank God, yes!"

"Then you have been awake —"

"For over an hour," she confessed, and I detected the shudder that went over her body.

"The man is mad —"

"But I am married to him." She stopped and caught at the rail like a prisoner gripping at the bars that confine him. "I cannot — cannot endure it! Where are you taking me? Where *can* you take me? Don't you see that there is no escape — from this?"

The *Sylph* rose and sank to the first long roll of the open sea.

"When we reach Malduna —" I began, but the words were only torture.

"I cannot — cannot go on. Take me back! — to that island. Let me live abandoned — or rather die —"

"Mrs. Joyce, I beg of you. . . ."

The schooner rose and dipped again.

For what seemed an interminable time we paced the deck together while Lakalatcha flamed farther and farther astern. Her words came in fitful snatches as if spoken in a delirium, and at times she would pause and grip the rail to stare back, wild-eyed, at the receding island.

Suddenly she started, and in a sort of blinding, noonday blaze I saw her face blanch with horror. It was as if at that moment the heavens had cracked asunder and the night had fallen away in chaos. Turning, I saw the cone of the mountain lifting skyward in fragments — and saw no more, for the blinding vision remained seared upon the

retina of my eyes. Across the water, slower paced, came the dread concussion of sound.

"Good God! It's carried away the whole island!" I heard the mate's voice bellowing above the cries of the men. The *Sylph* scudded before the approaching storm of fire redescending from the sky. . . .

The first gray of the dawn disclosed Mrs. Joyce still standing by the rail, her hand nestling within the arm of her husband, indifferent to the heavy grayish dust that fell in benediction upon her like a silent shower of snow.

The island of Muloa remains to-day a charred cinder lapped about by the blue Pacific. At times gulls circle over its blackened and desolate surface devoid of every vestige of life. From the squat, truncated mass of Laka-latcha, shorn of half its lordly height, a feeble wisp of smoke still issues to the breeze, as if Vulcan, tired of his forge, had banked its fire before abandoning it.